

Beautiful British Columbia's Chilcotin Country



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By Philip Matte © 1970



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Preface

We believe that in future years, people are going to have more leisure time through shorter working hours and longer holidays.

We also believe that man will use some of this time to explore the Wonders that exist in this great province of British Columbia.

With overcrowded cities and a faster living pace, people will welcome opportunities to explore the countryside and regain a new perspective of themselves and the land that they live in.

This book was written in the hope that it will provide an interesting guide into the vast Chilcotin country, a change of pace and a greater pride of British Columbia and the people that made it what it is today.

Introduction

Because of the nature of this book, we feel it necessary to provide maps and footnotes to help the reader locate the areas and subjects of interest to them.

The first thing to note is that all mileage was taken from a light truck and is recorded in tenths of a mile.

From Williams Lake to Riske Creek for example, the mileage is calculated from the old PGE station in Williams Lake .

We start at Mile Zero again from the Riske Creek store and so on, thereby only having small portions to deal with each time.

A sketch map of each individual area has also been provided with the approximate subject location.

Only the more difficult subjects have numbers with their corresponding numbers and approximate locations on the maps

There is a lot of elbow room in the vast Chilcotin country but one must also remember that a lot of the land is privately owned. And like all privately owned land, permission must be obtained before trespassing.

The big country is not like a city. The very thick forest in some places goes hundreds of miles before you come out. It is a very good thing to keep this in the back of your mind as you prepare for any venture. Make sure you know where you are and how to get back there.

The animals here are wild and as indeed with all wild creatures you are never sure of exactly what they're going to do. Any wild animal will defend itself if it considers itself cornered.

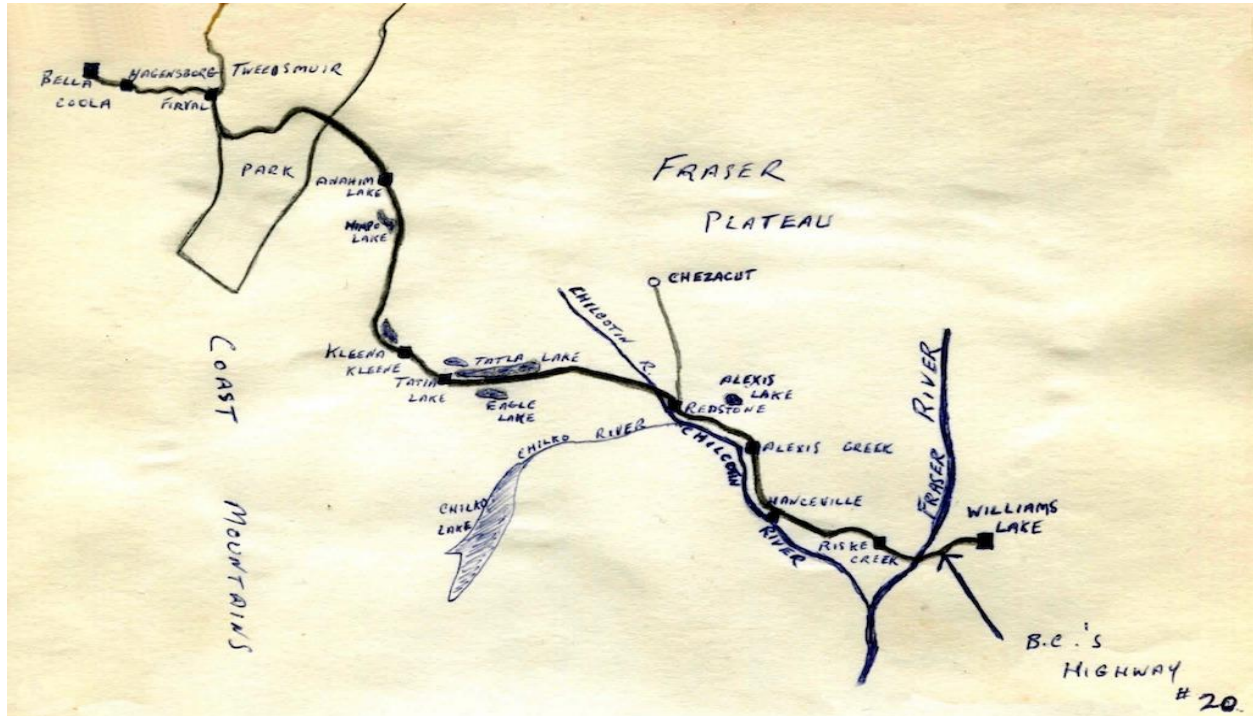
Have a healthy respect for all wild animals you might happen to encounter.

Like all other areas of our province, this one too can be defaced and made ugly. If we ourselves do not act as responsible individuals

Let's make sure but our children's children can say with pride and truth, that this is our land, **Beautiful British Columbia!**

Chapter One

The Road to Bella Coola



British Columbia's highway # 20, long before anyone ever thought of a road between Bella Coola and Williams Lake the only thing that existed were foot trails used by the Indians.

White men seeking routes into the interior goldfields followed these horse trails. The Gold Rush of the 1860's spurred men on to greater activity.

In 1862 Lieutenant H. S. Palmer of the Royal Engineers was commissioned to find a new route for the purpose of building a road from Bella Coola to Alexandra on the Fraser River.

The government however, decided to build a road through the Fraser Canyon in 1863 instead of Palmer's findings. Palmer's findings were just disregarded.

Part one of this road between Bella Coola and Williams Lake used to be known as the Barron Trail. He was a storekeeper from Quesnel. Most of his supplies were packed in from Bella Coola by horse.

In 1863 this trail was used a great deal because of the rich mines in the Caribou.

Time passed and it wasn't until the 1930s that new interest was shown in a road from Bella Coola to the interior. The government still said it was not practical but the people of Bella Coola did not agree.

Meanwhile on the other side of the mountains a rancher by the name of Stan Dowling reached Anahim Lake from Williams Lake by truck and established a freighting service.

Even the Canadian Army, during the second world war, decided against putting a road through to Bella Coola because of the high cost for construction through the Coast Mountain range. The Bella Coola citizens however we're still anxious to have a road connecting to other BC highways.

Finally they decided to build a road to the east themselves. And at the same time started one from Anahim Lake heading west.

Thomas Squiness, an Indian wolf hunter from Anahim lake guided them to a straighter and better way to the rim of the mountain.

The Graham Ranch at Tatla Lake provided a new bulldozer to build the road.

In September of 1952 the bulldozer started to ply its way toward Bella Coola. The bulldozer cut through some 30 miles of Jack Pines to the rim of the mountain overlooking the Bella Coola Valley.

The job took 42 days. They now had to look for the best way down some six thousand feet below. Quite a chore indeed but with financial help from the provincial government the job was completed.

The total cost was around \$60,000 with lots of faith and hard work contributed by the local people.

The odd thing was that the first vehicle to go over the road to Bella Coola was an American tourist from Washington State. Now indeed Bella Coola was connected to all North American highways and the people were able to drive anywhere they chose.

The road was opened on the 25th of September 1953 and today extends over 1/2 the total width of British Columbia.

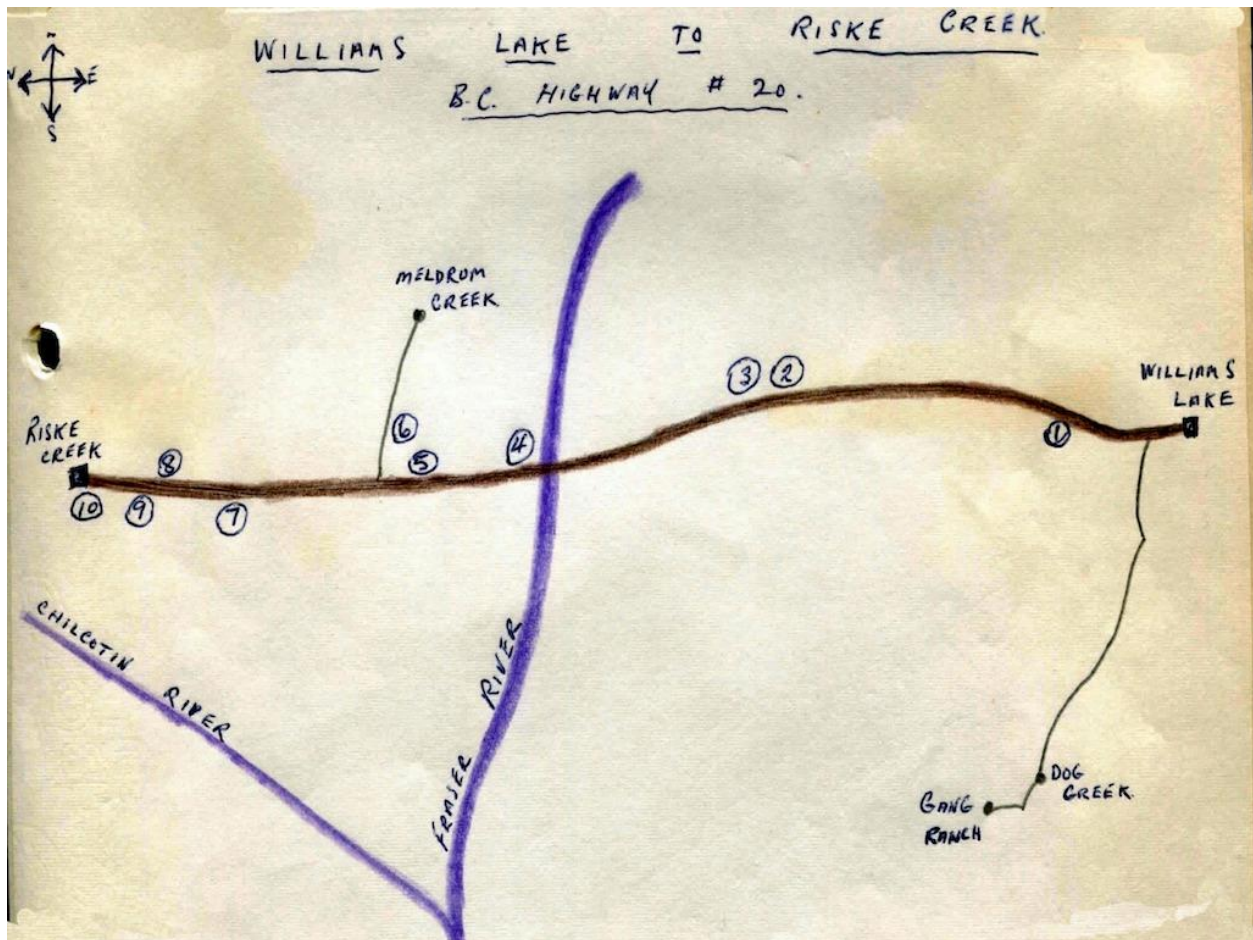
It winds across the Fraser Plateau through open range country, over rivers, past beautiful clear water lakes. It goes through deep green natural meadows, through clumps of pine, fir, and aspen trees, through very arid areas and lush forests. Finally to the rim of the Coast Range then down some 6000 feet to the Bella Coola Valley.

Some people refer to Highway # 20 as the "Road of Romance" because of the rich historical happenings of years ago. You can feel the freedom of the uncrowded frontier as it exists today as in years gone by.

The countryside is wild and clean. One has only to see the hundreds of white-faced cattle grazing on the wide open stretches and you know that you are indeed in the "Big Country"

Chapter Two

William's Lake to Riske Creek B.C. Highway # 20





Williams Lake

Elevation 3088 ft above sea level.

Williams Lake is the “cattle capital” of British Columbia. It services the surrounding areas including the large Chilcotin country.

The town itself is situated at the west end of Williams Lake; a lake some 5 miles in length. The current town population is estimated to be 3900 with another 4000 people residing within a 5-mile radius.

Its history goes back before the Gold Rush days in the early 1800's when it was a stopping off place for the fur traders traveling from Fort Alexander to the Okanagan.

The town and the lake are named after an Indian chief called Willyum, who was responsible for maintaining peace between his people and the early white settlers.

The settlement grew as a result of the gold rush and it boasted of a post office as early as 1861.

The Pacific Great Eastern Railway started servicing the town in 1914 and Williams Lake was incorporated in 1929. With the real way and Highway # 97 the town is of major importance as a supply and distribution centre.

The mountain slopes are the source of the largest industry with lumber and plywood mills humming the year round.

Cattle is the second largest industry with some 500 ranches in the surrounding area with cattle outnumbering people 9 to 1.

Williams Lake means “stampede.” This outstanding event takes place annually, the last three days of June and the 1st of July. Cowboys from all over the world take part in this rip-roaring competition, which reminds one of the fact that this is the real West.

In addition to the regular events there are many other worthwhile attractions such as the colourful Indian War Bonnet races.

Around the year 1900, Bob Borland, one of the original ranchers at Williams Lake, constructed a 10 mile irrigation ditch from 150 Mile House to his ranch. The water was used to irrigate fields of wheat which he used to grind into flour and sell to the miners in the gold fields.

As hard as it may be to believe, the present Stampede site was once a field of wheat. Parts of this ditch can still be seen at the new Boitanio Park in Williams Lake.

The original P.G.E. Station built in the fall of 1919 still stands and is in good repair. This building is located at the foot of Oliver Street in the centre of town.

A real fine city, with friendly people who make you feel at home away from home. They also have one of the finest museums north of Vancouver. A stop there proves most interesting and provides the visitor with quick information regarding the area.

Philip Coxon



People like Philip Coxon, pictured above, are in no small way responsible for the character and progress of Williams Lake. Let's take a closer look at Mr. Coxon.

Originally from England he went to the United States in 1911. He came up to Canada by schooner from Oregon to Canada and then up to Alaska where he worked in construction.

Having read literature put out by the Canadian government, he came to the Caribou in 1918. He applied and received a 160 acre homestead at Forest Grove. Mr Coxon was 27 years of age at the time.

There he raised cattle and horses until 1920 when he sold out and came to live in Williams Lake some 51 years ago.

There was no school, no doctor at that time but ever since then there has been continual steady growth. He recalls that the money for the first school was raised through a box social.

He can also remember in the old days playing the banjo and singing in the surrounding towns to raise money for Boy Scouts and other organizations.

Many years ago when he was working at Williams Lake, his wife was sick at Forest Grove. He didn't receive any letter from her for three weeks and became very concerned. So concerned as a matter of fact that he walked and ran from Williams Lake to their old home at Forest Grove some 60 miles to see her.

He also recalls, with a great show of humour, how surprised he was to find her in the best of health.

Mr Coxon is a life member of the Elks, Old Age Pensioners and the Legion. Quite something!

Recently he created the following poem to help raise money for the building of Parkside home in Williams Lake, where he now resides.



What is it? Moose or Horse

Located on the trail, exactly as shown in the picture, 7 miles from Williams Lake, there's a large clearing on the left side of the highway where a number of interesting walking trails can be followed leading back from the highway. As the above picture indicates you just don't know what you'll discover.



Old Pioneer Log Cabin

10 miles from Williams Lake, on the right side of the highway, stands a good example of the type of dwellings built by the early pioneers.

This particular cabin was hand-hewn from the neighbouring forest and is only 5 or 10 ft off the edge of the highway. The only inhabitants at this time are pack rats but it still stands, reminding one of days gone by.



Caribou Fence

The above picture was taken about two hundred feet down from the old cabin. These fences are quite common throughout the whole Cariboo Chilcotin country.

They are strong, simple fences requiring only a little wire to secure the ends together and a lot of elbow grease getting the poles down from the nearby pine forest. These fences do their part in making this area unique and rich in colour.



Chilcotin Bridge

This bridge spans the Fraser River some 150 feet below. There's a plaque on the west end of the bridge which records the dedication in 1961.

It is reported that the cost was over one million dollars and replaced the old bridge that was built in 1904. A few minutes taken to walk on the bridge are very rewarding.

You can see in the above picture some steel girders and stone foundations which are all that's left of the old bridge. A very beautiful area where the Fraser River cuts through the mountains, which go up on both sides very rapidly, spotted with evergreen trees and great open areas of bunchgrass. The rise to a height of over 3,000 feet from the level of the Fraser River, providing an atmosphere of natural wonder.



Big Horn Sheep Ranch

To the immediate west of the bridge you'll see the mountain sides, as pictured above. This is the home of the California bighorn sheep and over 200 are reported to inhabit the area.

This is a game reserve and the animals are well protected. From the west end of the Chilcotin Bridge you have a commanding view of these hills and within a minute or two, with a good pair of binoculars, one might get a sighting of those magnificent animals.



Reward for Cattle Rustlers

As hard as it might seem to believe, cattle rustling is still a problem with the ranchers in the Chilcotin country. The reward is a very real attempt by these people to stop these crimes.

The last rustler was caught in 1971. They left this man off with only a fine and needless to say the ranchers were not pleased with the judgment.

This sign is located on the right side of the highway just past the entrance to the first ranch you come to west of the Chilcotin bridge.



McIntyre Lake

A very beautiful lake nestled between stands of aspen and jack pine trees.

It is located approximately one-half mile from the highway on the Meldrum Creek road. You can catch glimpses of the beautiful sky blue water as you drive north.

There are very good unimproved campsites along the side of the lake and you can fish for rainbow trout from rafts left on shore.

Muskrats are also residing in the lake. If you are observant and quiet you'll see them swimming with their long tails out of the water searching for food.

A real nice place to spend a quiet day or two.



Johnny Walls Cabin

Approximately 5 miles from the Meldrum Creek junction, on the left side of the road, there stands the remains of old Johnny's cabin.

It is told that Johnny Wall, a number of years ago, stole an old milk cow and butchered it. He was then arrested and never seen again since that time.

No one seems to have heard anymore about him, however his cabin still stands. It's like a lonely ghost waiting for his return.



Range Riders' Cabin and Corral

Located 6.3 miles from Meldrum Creek Junction on the right side of the highway.

This cabin was used many years ago by “riders” hired by the ranchers. They were lived in by the cowboys because the main ranch house was usually too far to return to at the end of a working day. They would live in these, perhaps 3 months or more at a time.

One of their jobs was to keep the cattle off the road. The corrals you see, were used to hold the cattle for shipment to market.



Beechers' Prairie

The scene shown above is one that greets the visitor.

The countries of the "Big Sky", stretching as far as the eye can see and as vast a land as anywhere in this world.

This is the land that pioneers like Fred Beecher and others saw and decided to make it their home.

Wide open and rich with bunch grass, they recognized a different kind of gold than others seekers of that era.

When you see it you understand what they mean when they exclaim," Big and Beautiful Chilcotin Country."

Stage Coach Stop.

Started in 1885 this large building became known as the Beecher House, a combination of hotel, saloon and general store, which to many, was like an oasis in the desert.

The hotel and store were at one time the best stocked of any establishment north of Vancouver. Fred Beecher's store was reported to have carried a stock in excess of \$70,000.

Meals were \$0.25, whiskey the dollar a pint, and you could even get it for less if you supplied your own bottle. A really nice place to stop and relax after a long and bumpy stagecoach ride.

Mr. Beecher had the first telephone installed and also brought in the first Cadillac which he operated some fifteen years as a taxi.

One day the old hotel burnt down but that didn't discourage as strong a man as the pioneer, Fred Beecher. He built another hotel.

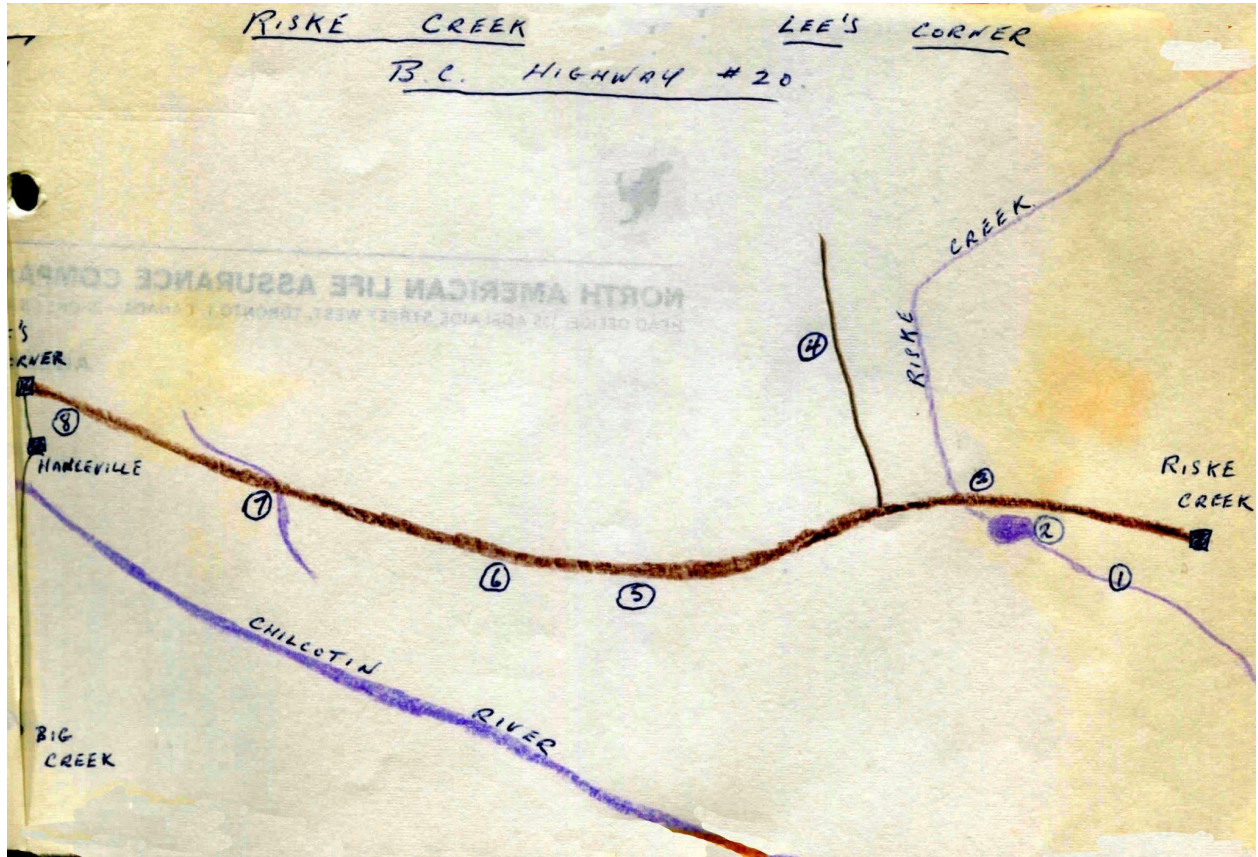
As a matter of fact that's the building you can see standing down in the valley across from the Riske Creek store. The only thing was he built it much larger than the original.

But there simply wasn't enough business in the area to support it and with bad economic times things did not go as well as he hoped.

Today the only visitor is the wind purring along the large outside veranda and ghostly memories of laughter and rip-roaring times gone by.

Chapter Three

Riske Creek, Lee's Corner B.C Highway # 20





Riske Creek

In the above picture there's the post office, general store, and a garage for the community of Riske Creek.

The creek itself is on the other side of the highway winding its way down in the valley below.

The name Riske came from an old pioneer named Riske, who took up land alongside the creek. He stayed there so long that they decided to name the creek and community after him.

Old Mill

Approximately one-half mile from the store, off the road to the left, you'll see a little shack. The creek is behind this shack and the remains of the Old Mill are located 25 to 50 ft to the right on the creek.

The old water paddle wheel is down now but it is still there and just as large as ever. Fred Beecher had the mill built and some of the lumber used in building the Beecher house was made here.

Prairie Chicken

A number of years ago they brought some Sharp Tailed Grouse to this area and although they are not too numerous, they seem to be doing quite well.

The Sharp Tailed Grouse (prairie chicken) is a large chicken-like bird with pale brown and white feathers. When they are disturbed they rise quite rapidly with their wings making a loud whirring sound, usually flying straight away.

In flight they use their wings for a short while, then they glide a little way and land and then repeat this action again, while their bodies rock from side to side.

Once you see this grouse in flight, you can easily identify them in future. They like the broad prairie lands where there is provision for their nests and food. The Sharp Tailed Grouse is considered to be one of the best game birds available



Beecher Dam and Lake

There is a lot of room here to park, camp and fish for rainbow trout.

This lake is the backup of water created when Fred Beecher built a dam across Riske Creek at this point. The dam was built by Mr. Beecher to provide the water power necessary to move the water wheel installed at the mill some distance from the creek. It was built in 1910 and is still in quite good repair.

Good pan sized rainbow trout are in this lake and provide the angler with quite a thrill when hooked.

On the south side of the lake there is a footpath which if followed will lead you to a fallen aspen tree. You can find this tree on the right side of the trail some 300 yards in. This tree was cut down by beavers and if you look carefully you'll see where some of the bark has been chewed away.

Beavers consider the aspen bark a delicacy. Further down you'll see their lodges.

Prairie Wolf

If you listen carefully you'll hear what at first sounds like the yapping of a group of dogs. This yapping is followed by sharp clear howling. These are coyotes you hear and it's a sound you'll remember for a long time.

Listen for the sounds in the late evening or early morning.

The coyote, prairie wolf or small wolf are abundant in this area. It is a valuable scavenger and destroyer of rodents, but it also destroys domestic animals and birds.

The prairie wolf, when by himself, hunts only small animals. But when in a pack they attack larger mammals.

They're cunning animals and in spite of man's effort, they still are quite numerous. They are properly called coyotes. However some people still refer to them as prairie wolf or small wolf. Take your choice because no matter what they are called, they will continue to add colour and personality to the area.



Range Rider, His Dog and Horse

His cabin is located 3 miles from the Riske Creek store.

Ross Paisley is his name. His occupation is that of a range rider.

His mare's name is Pinto and his dog is called Tippy.

Ross Paisley has been working for a great number of years in the Chilcotin area and knows it as well as anyone. If you're lucky enough to meet him, you'll not soon forget his friendly attitude and smile.

He can also tell you stories about his experiences that will give you a greater understanding of the country and the people.

There are many cowboys working for a great number of ranches. Ranches with romantic names such as Wine Glass and Gang Ranch, just to mention a few.

Everyone's heard or read about cattle empires right? Well some of the ranches located in the Chilcotin are perhaps the world's greatest cattle empires.

It's a fact that one ranch up here occupies an area of approximately 2 1/2 million acres. Think of it. 2 and 1/2 million acres. That's large!

Famous Canadian Author's Home

If you look at the house directly across the road from Ross Paisley's place, you'll see the house of Eric Collier, a world-renowned author.

Mr Collier wrote a great number of stories during his life. His famous book "Three Against the Wilderness" is currently being sold in many countries of the world.

One of these great Canadian stories was actually experienced by the author himself.

Soda Springs

This spring is located off the first road on the right, past Ross Paisley's place.

Up this road about 1 mile or so there is a large group of aspen trees to the left. In front of these trees just a couple of feet off the road, is a large outcropping of rock which appears slightly grey in colour. In the middle of this rock there is a hole ground.

It is possible to get a container, perhaps a cup full of the soda water. in some mysterious way the water bubbles up producing a sound you might expect from boiling water. Covering this hole to the spring was a heavy stone.

Before the white man came to this area this place was visited by Indians from all over. They believed that the water could cure certain diseases.

Even today it is reported that medical people from many miles away come to get the water to bring back to their patients. The water is reported to be rich in minerals and other ingredients.

If you take a second look at the aspen trees all around the spring you'll notice many carved initials. This has been a popular camping and stop off spot for many years.

It's an eerie sound produced by the spring, especially if you sit quietly alongside and watch the hills rolling away before you.

Standing Corral

Located 7.3 miles from the Riske Creek store on the left side of the highway is a corral. It is maintained by the forest service to aid the ranchers in their drives.

Cattle can only feed on a certain area for a limited time. Then they have to be herded to another area.

The cowboys can, on such a journey, herd the cattle into the corrals for the night thereby eliminating night riding.

These corals are spaced at a distance of one day's Journey.

Tree House

Nine miles from the store there's a small group of buildings on the left of the highway. If you look carefully on top of one of the evergreen trees you'll see a tree house. It is a most unexpected sight out here and it is 20 or so feet off the ground.

Sawmill Creek

A beautiful little creek which goes under the highway just 16.9 miles from the Riske Creek store. You have to watch carefully for this one, being as there's no bridge involved.

On the left of the highway there are some really good camping grounds. They are not equipped with park facilities but they are nice.

Opposite the campgrounds, there are a number of deserted buildings. At one time there was a store, lodge and a number of small log cabins. These buildings are still standing today but like a great number of cabins they are completely deserted.

There are a great number of beavers along this creek complete with lodges and a very large dam.

A really nice place to stop and study the beaver at his work.



Cattle Guard and White Capped Coast Range

The above photo was taken at 22.7 miles from the Riske Creek store.

This is only one of several guards that crossed the highway. Constructed with sections of railway tracks, a number of them are placed at a distance of some five or six inches apart. They are very effective.

If cattle attempt to cross they get their hooves between the rails and do not go any further.

There are no problems crossing over with a vehicle. If you look carefully at the photo you'll see the white cap mountains of the Coast Range. This is the first view you get of the distant Coast Range and you'd swear you were approaching the Canadian Rockies.

Chilcotin Valley Viewpoint

Approximately one hundred yards past the cattle guard on the left side of the highway there is the most panoramic view you'll get anywhere in the world. It's magnificent!

There's a good place to park and even camp-a-while if you choose.

From this viewpoint the beautiful Chilcotin river is at your feet winding its way through the valley below to join with the Fraser.

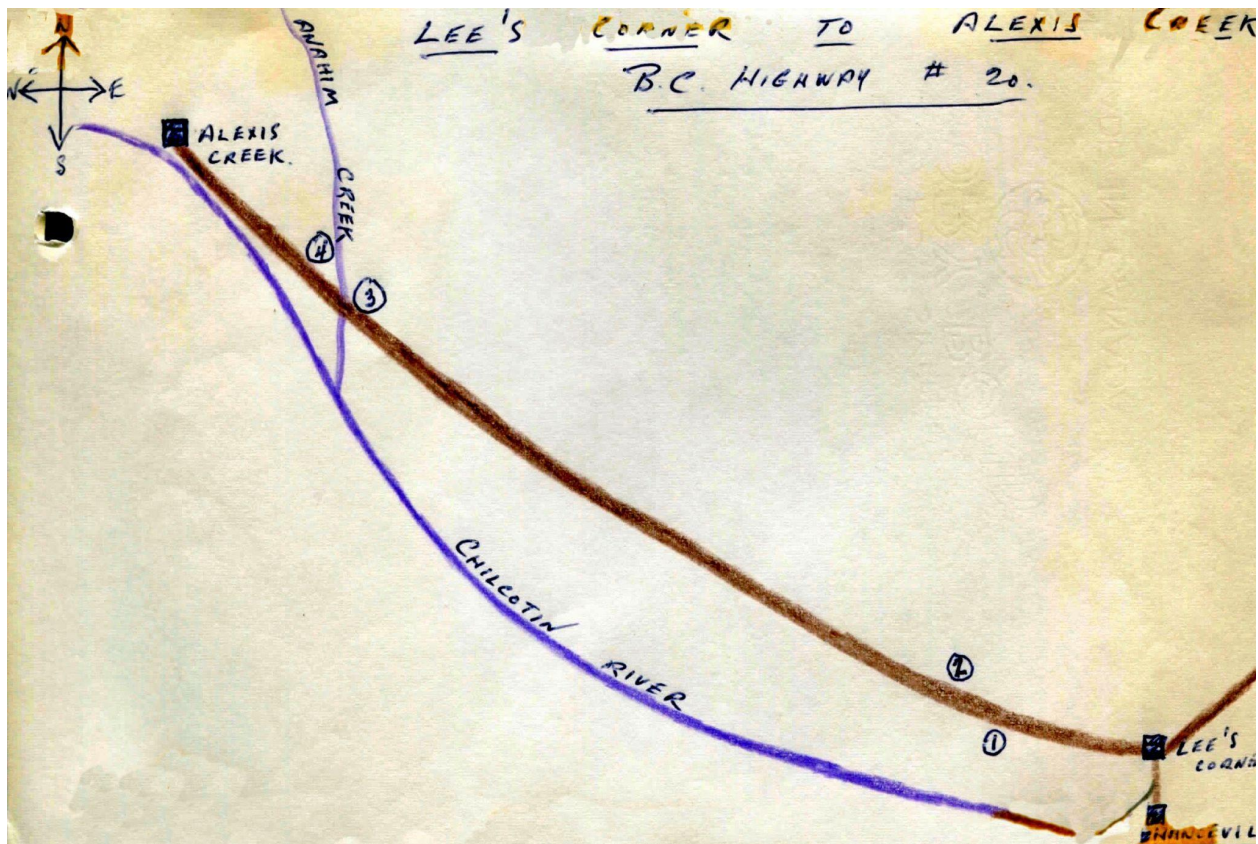
On the far left you can see the Fraser Plateau and when you see it from this point you understand the meaning of the word plateau. You are also standing on the Fraser Plateau here at this point.

To the right on a clear day you can view the rugged Coast Mountains seemingly towering atop the whole world.

There's a plaque there telling you about Norman Lee's famous cattle drive to the Yukon. Norman Lee was one of the original ranchers in the area.

Chapter Four

Lee's Corner to Alexis Creek, B.C. Highway # 20





Lees' Corner

Established by Mr Dan Lee several decades ago as a trading post.

There is a store, restaurant, garage and motel and other buildings in the community.

Mr. Lee is related to the famous pioneer Norman Lee of the great Yukon Cattle Drive.

You have only to talk to Dan Lee and you'll discover what tremendous strength of character these people have. The type of strength that you read about but seldom meet the people who actually have it. That strength is responsible for shaping the country into what it is today.

Hanceville

Three miles from the junction at Lee's Corner is Hanceville, where the local post office is located.

It is actually the T. H. Guest Ranch, recorded as the first land staked in the Chilcotin.

Hanceville started as a trading post and for a long time was the area's only stopping place west of the Fraser River.



Chilcotin Story Teller

George Myers is his name. The picture was taken on the Stoney Reserve in front of the school building that he was responsible for establishing.

At the time of this writing he was 87 years of age, still active as a prospector and ready to answer the call of any worthwhile project.

Whenever there is an Indian celebration in the Chilcotin country, George Myers is one of the first to be invited.

He can remember well the old Chilcotin stories he heard as a child around campfires, stories brought down from generation to generation.

George Meyers can sing with a strong voice, the deep moving music of his people.

A man of many experiences, he can recall being a cowboy for the nearby Chilcote Ranch, a trapper, a logger, and he holds a current Prospectors License. And on top of all that, he can help cure you of aches and pains. Just ask him about this. Many people have and many people were cured.

Chilcotin Story of Daylight

(As told by George Myers.)

“A long time ago there never used to be daylight, long time ago, dark all the time. There was just the one man who had some kind of bag that when opened there was daylight all over.

One day one fellow came along and stole that light and carried it off. He kept travelling until he came to these people who had a great amount of berries. He told them he was hungry and if they gave him some berries he would open the bag and give them daylight.

They told him he must open the bag first so they could be sure of what he was saying. So he opened it a little bit and sure enough it was all day light. They all got together and gave that fellow some berries. Well pretty soon he opened that bag all up so it was daylight all the time.

Pretty soon people don't sleep so they gather that daylight back and make it dark so long and daylight that long again, so they can sleep. That's how daylight came. “

Old Deserted RCMP Post

3.3 miles from Lee's Corner on the left side of the highway you'll notice some old wooden foundations behind the fence. These buildings were used by the RCMP before they moved to Alexis Creek. The old beams are all that remains to remind you of the former location of the post.



Chilcotin Trading Post

In the above picture is one of the original fur trading posts that are strung along the Chilcotin Trail.

This one was operated by a Mr. Martin until the year 1946 and as you can see is still in quite good repair.

Indians and trappers alike would come from the surrounding areas trying to get the best possible deal for their winter catch.

Many a night the coal oil lamp of the post kept burning until a settlement fair to all parties was reached. Today the building stands to the right of the highway some 4.3 miles from Lee's Corner.

Trembling Aspen (poplar)

You'll notice these beautiful trees throughout the Fraser Plateau. Sometimes in groups by themselves, sometimes mixed in with the Lodgepole Pines.

A quick identification is, white bark marked with black horseshoe markings here and there on the tree. A chalk-like substance can be rubbed off the bark and it is supposed to be heaviest on the south of the tree.

It was thereby used as a direction finder.

The leaves have a flat stem and tremble from the slightest breeze.

It is used in the United States for matchwood but in British Columbia it serves mainly for firewood. In the fall the leaves turn from a fresh green to a brilliant deep yellow.



Anahim Indian Reserve

Some 6.9 mi from Lee's Corner you come to the Anahim Reserve, to the right of the highway.

There are two churches on the reserve.

The population is 606 at this time. All the fields around belong to these people and they are reported to have a great number of cattle.

They have their own running water, a government of their own, complete with police officers.

On the left of the highway you can see the large corrals where they round up the cattle for the market at Williams Lake.

Chilcotin Indians

The Chilcotin Indians are Athapaskan speaking and they are related to the Apache Indians of the southwestern United States.

Their total population is over 1,100 at the four Chilcotin Reserves.

The name Chilcotin is of ancient local origin and means “inhabitants of young man’s river.”

They are primarily hunters living in an area of abundant game. They also harvest the berries that grow in tremendous quantities around them.

They have retained their own language but their culture has been modified by neighbouring tribes. From the Shuswaps to the east, they adopted the weaving of mats and the use of underground houses called keek willy.

Their social structure was influenced by the coastal tribes where they exchanged skins and berries for salmon and ornaments. They have never abandoned their somewhat wandering life of big game hunters.

Today, as you travel through the Chilcotin country, it is quite common to see these people camped along the way with their canvas tents, wagons and horses.

Helped by the outdoor life they live, they are a strong and happy people and have a distinctly commanding stature. When you meet and talk with them you notice a deep and silent pride that flows from their eyes, making you aware of the greatness of a human being.

Suddenly you are aware that you are a human being too, and you walk away an inch or two taller.

Soopolallie-Soapberry

The name of these berries comes from the Indians and is broken down as follows, soop meaning soap and olallie meaning berry.

This berry grows in abundance in the Chilcotin country but not at the coast where the Bella Coola Indians live.

The berries are orange red in colour, transparent and grow in small clusters along the stems and twigs. When you rub these berries in your hands they produce a soapy froth.

The Indians prepare these berries in a manner that produces a type of light cake that when mixed with a little water froths up like ice cream. As a matter of fact, this is very delicious and a special treat, one that the Bella Coola and other people liked very much. This was a prime treating item for the Chilcotin Indians.

Deserted Buildings

At Mile 8.4 from Lee's Corner, you'll see some deserted buildings on the right of the highway. These buildings are typical of other deserted places along the Chilcotin trail.

They seem to be in good repair but for some reason or another are not lived in at this time.

Perhaps some rancher tried his luck and failed, leaving behind the buildings he once inhabited as a testimony of his attempt.

Anahim Creek

A few feet further down, the bridge crosses over Anahim Creek. If you go to the right of the bridge you'll note several pools.

These are crystal clear and it's not uncommon to see several rainbow trout gathered together just resting in these pools.

Bank Swallows

Directly to the left of the creek, you'll notice some clay banks on the right side of the highway.

There are a great number of holes burrowed into the side of these banks and many birds hovering overhead.

These are the homes of the bank swallows.

Volcanic Rock

At one time this whole area must have been subject to volcanoes. There are traces of this all along the highway.

The best example of this rock was found at 11.5 mi from Lee's Corner on the right of the highway.

Vast quantities of this lava rock are in this particular area presenting a site of interesting shapes and forms.



Rabbit Brush

This brush is often confused with sagebrush, but there is a difference.

The Sagebrush have leaves that are notched at the top.

Rabbitbrush does not, although both shrubs grow in the same arid terrain.

The Rabbit Brush blooms from the middle of August to the middle of September. As seen in this picture, Rabbit Brush has pale green leaves and stalks with yellow flowers when in bloom.

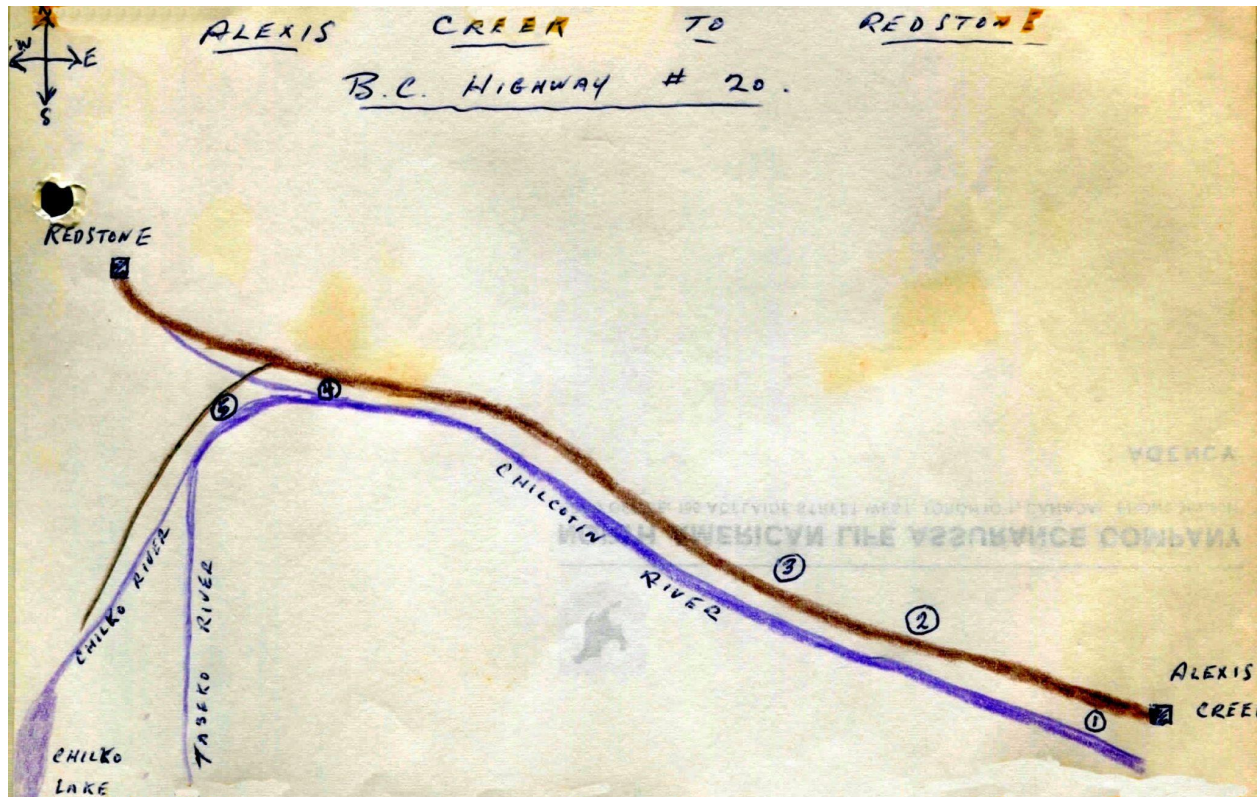
The latex found in some species has been suggested as a source of rubber.

The Pauite Indians in the southwest used to chew the wood and bark as a crude chewing gum.

If you take some leaves from the shrub and rub them together, a spicy aroma is produced that lingers for a considerable time.

Chapter Five

Alexis Creek to Redstone, B.C. Highway # 20





Alexis Creek

The main street is pictured above looking east from the post office. This is a larger community with paved streets and a wide selection of goods and services.

There are 65 permanent white residents and as many Indian residents.

The community was established in 1886 and was named after an Indian chief called Alexis.

The valley is one of the most beautiful areas you'll ever see, with colour everywhere. All lush and green with hay fields in the valley bottom and the sides of the hills heavily timbered with fir and evergreens of all kinds.

That's what it's like in this great Chilcotin country. You can turn a corner and you're forever surprised and delighted at what you see.

Unidentified Graves

At one point, three miles from the Alexis Creek post office, are two unidentified graves.

You will see a wire gate and 10 feet further, next to the creek bank there are two large depressions.

The local people will tell you that these are graves.

Who is buried here they do not know. Perhaps two gold seekers died along the way on their quest for riches. No one knows for sure except the person or person who buried them.



Bull Canyon

At 3.9 miles you come to the entrance of Bull Canyon.

In the above photo the Chilcotin River winds its way just to the left of the main highway with sheer rock walls on the right, rising hundreds of feet towards the sky.

This canyon is very rich in history and many items of value have been found here. They called it Bull Canyon because the early ranchers used to keep their bulls from their herds here.

At one entrance to the canyon the rocks are so steep the animals could not get out. The rock walls were a natural barrier for them and the river offered no escape.

All the ranchers had to do was to string a log fence across the narrow west entrance, which you can see in the back of the photo, and they had themselves a real effective natural corral.

Indian Wars

Bull Canyon was also the site of many great battles between the Bella Coola Indians to the west and the Chilcotin to the east.

The story told about one battle in this canyon goes something like this.

Many years ago the Bella Coola warriors were coming to attack the Chilcotin. The Chilcotin had got wind of this and climbed to the top of a rock to wait for them.

When the Bella Coola warriors arrived they had to pass through the canyon under this large rock and the Chilcotins started a rockslide and killed a great number of them causing the remaining few to retreat.

They named this large rock Battle Rock. You can locate it 4.5 miles from the Alex Creek Post Office. Battle Rock can be seen at the far right of the Bull Canyon photo.

Campgrounds

A short distance down on the left of the highway are some real nice unimproved campsites next to the Chilcotin river.

This is a natural bench with the river some 20 ft lower than the campsites.

The Chilcotin is a prime fishing river producing steelhead, trout and dolly varden.

Not too long ago an old Hudson's Bay trading musket was found in this area, the kind used to trade with the Indians for their furs.

Many skeletons have also been found in this area, relating to the many wars fought here.

Caves

At 5.6 miles, if you look up to the right, you can see a number of caves.

These caves are said to have been used as temporary shelters by people travelling through the country.

In the early 1980s many grizzly skulls were found in these caves. Indian arrowheads have also been found in some of these caves relating to earlier Wars. They are very interesting and have been there for all to see for many years.

As hard as it might be to believe, some of these caves are reported to be ice-bound throughout the entire year and that's really something when you consider how warm their summers are.

Old Fort Chilcotin

This fort was an outpost of the larger Hudson's Bay Fort at Alexandra on the Fraser River. Established in 1828 and abandoned in 1872, this Old Fort was engaged in trading with the Indians for some 43 years.

It was located in the meadow called Hudson's Bay Flat, owned by a rancher named Gabriel Bailiff. His father rented the farm from the Hudson's Bay Company until the family purchased the land in 1941.

Nearby there are two square depressions in the ground grown over with grass. They spot it by the particular grass that grows on the depressions, the same grass the Indian women used to weave baskets from.

Nearby are numerous Keekwilly holes, where Indians used to live in their underground houses.

An old Hudson's Bay trade musket was found on the trail leading to Alexandra and old chips of obsidian and glassy basalt. Perhaps a place where arrowhead makers did their work.

Mystery surrounds the story of this fur trading outpost and what eventually happened at its end may never be known.

The site of the Old Fort at Hudson's Bay Flat is 11.6 mi from Alexis Creek post office to the left of the highway. Look for several high tufts of grass, grass higher than your knee.

Famous Salmon Spawning River

Up the Chilko river come the destiny bound salmon in the hundreds of thousands to lay their eggs. In the spring the eggs hatch by the millions and make their way to Chilko Lake where they spend one year.

Approximately one-half of them survive and swim downstream to the ocean. Here they vanish to some unknown area of the Pacific and grow to maturity.

It is written that only 5 to 20% of the original fish that hatched live to celebrate their 4th birthday.

Keekwilly Holes

This is an old encampment spot where many temporary dwellings are set up by the Chilcotin Indians who come here to fish for salmon.

To get to this encampment you turn off at the Chilko lake junction about 13 miles from Alexis Creek. You go in for about 2 miles until you come to the top of the first hill and there it is on both sides, the keekwilly holes.

It is a very large camping area on a bench just above the Chilko river. It has to be large because great numbers of the Chilcotins still come here every year during the last two weeks in August and the first two in September.

Here they stay, to catch their fish, smoke them and then return to their homes. It is one of the great gathering places for these Chilcotin people, the same place used by their ancestors, for the same purposes, for more years than men can remember.



Indian Salmon Net Platform

This platform is located just below Keekwilly Hole Campground on the Chilko river.

It is from platforms like the one pictured above that the Indians net their salmon.

This is quite a narrow gorge and the spawning salmon come through here by the thousands making it quite easy for them to net them.

The rocks are very steep and go straight down into the water. It requires a strong arm and good sense of balance to do this type of work and these people know what they are doing.

The platform itself is constructed from pine trees all wired together and this is secured by wire to a rock on the bank.

From the platform on the river, there is a winding trail which leads back up to the old Indian encampment. On the rocks along the trail above the platform, if you look carefully, you'll notice some type of writing and pictures, probably done by the Chilcotin Indians.

Pioneer Ranch

One well-known rancher in the area is Mr Bayliff.

His main ranch is located 18.3 miles from Alexis Creek on the left of the highway. The large ranch house was built in 1925 and a good percentage of the materials came from right around this area.

They have their own sawmill and a great number of other pieces of equipment necessary to carry on their work. They have to be able to do many things on their own because of the distance for services and the winters.

Bridge

Some 21.3 miles *later* you cross over a bridge and say goodbye to the Chilcotin River.

The river runs from the north now and has been your almost constant companion since you left Alexis Creek. The Chilcotin river is close to 145 Mi long from its source to where it flows into the Fraser.

Can you see it?



You have the advantage because you're being asked if you can see it, therefore you expect to see something.

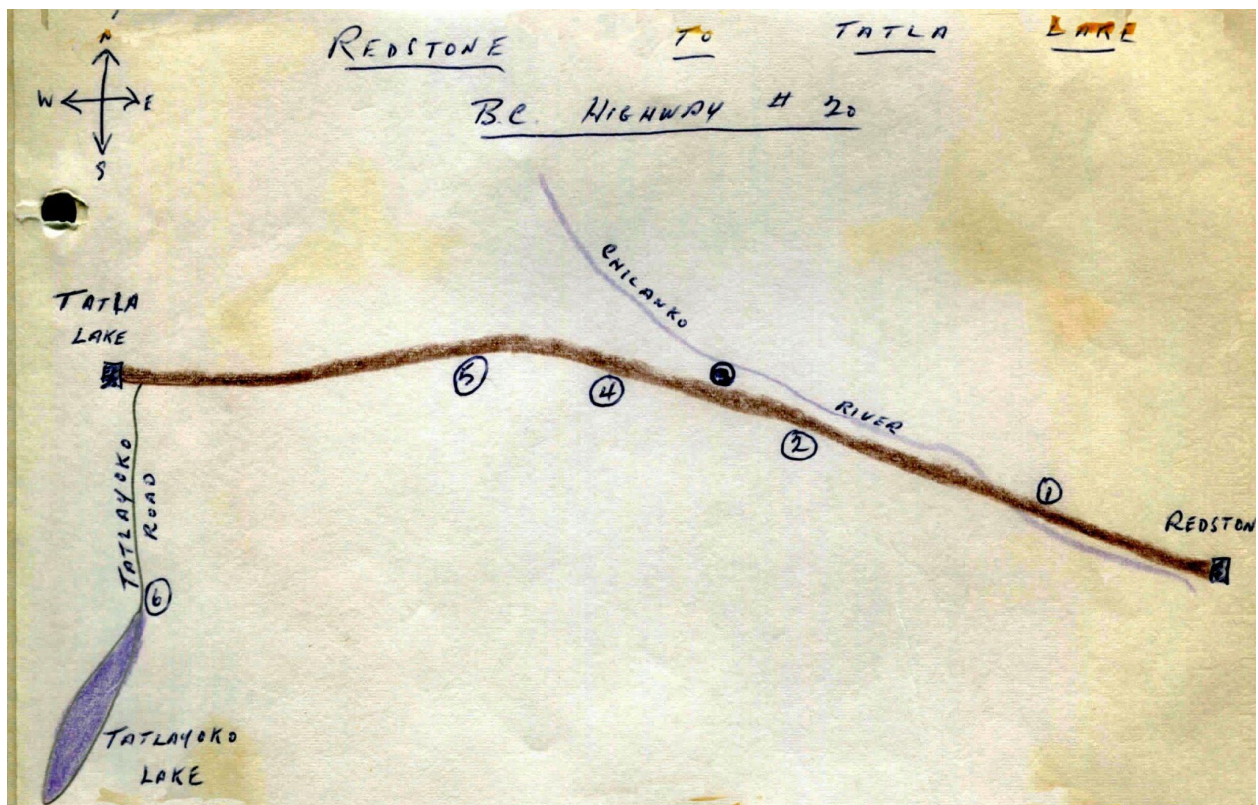
Just imagine yourself in a situation where you are not expecting to see anything.

In such a case, as it more often is, you might pass right on by not knowing you are being carefully observed. Perhaps you know what's pictured above or, perhaps you don't.

Refer to the next chapter for a closer look and explanation.

Chapter 6

Redstone to Tatla Lake, B.C. Highway # 20



Redstone

The community of Redstone is located in a very pretty spot with a creek running alongside behind the store.

As in all the communities so far, the main highway is also the Main Street.

Redstone has a general store, post office, garage, and a number of other buildings. The community was named after the red coloured stones that are located further up the highway.

Many inexperienced travellers to the area feel that they have to carry all their supplies with them prior to their trip, but as you can see, there are numerous communities on the highway which provide most everything you need.

BearBerry

Some 3.5 mi from Redstone heading west on the right side of the highway, you'll notice a lot of green spreading plants under the pine trees.

The name for these is Kinnickinnic.

They take on a mat-like appearance and spread like vines. The leaves are a very glossy green and there are red berries from August to midwinter which are much desired by both grouse and bear.

The dried leaves can be used as a substitute for tobacco and in parts of Russia are used for a tea called Kutai. Although the red berries are dry and tasteless, they become quite palatable when cooked.

Landlocked Salmon - Kokanee

For those people who have had the experience of fishing for the spunky Kokanee, Proznik Lake offers real good catches. These fish are not only great sports but they also offer one of nature's most tasty meals.

The lake is located approximately four miles off the main highway via a side road clearly marked with a road arrow pointing the direction. There are also some good public campgrounds located at the lake.

There is also excellent trout fishing here.

Proznik Lake is quite large, being some 7 to 8 miles long and 2 to 3 miles across. Watch out for the winds however, because as in all large lakes, the water can become very rough in a short period of time.

Chilanko River

At 7.3 miles from Redstone General Store there is a nice place to park and spend a while. There is a beautiful little Lake on the right to go down and see.

For the past few miles the river running to the left of the highway was the Chilanko River and there are many nice pools along the way to fish for your dinner. These rivers are very productive in rainbow trout.



Indian Burial Grounds

These grounds are located to the left of the highway some 12 miles from Redstone and if you don't take your time driving here, you could quite easily pass by. This is one of the burial grounds for the Chilcotin Indians.

The individual graves are all fenced-in as you can see in the above picture and are decorated with beautiful painted crosses. The main graveyard is completely fenced with wire and gate providing an atmosphere of distinction in this wide-open land. It is a quiet and lovely spot overlooking the valley in the background.

Red Stone

To the right of the highway at approximately 13 miles you will see the red coloured Bluffs that gave the community its name.

Redstone Reserve

A mile or so past the graveyard you come to an open area where the Redstone Indian Reservation comes into view.

It is located to the left of the highway and is very interesting. The church stands right in the middle of the reserve with the individual homes around it which reminds one of people sitting around a campfire.

Chilanko Forks

This is the site of a large burned down sawmill. 18.9 miles from Redstone you will see the old beehive burner still standing.

This mill, when it was operating, employed a great number of men, until fire destroyed it in 1971. As you walk around the site you get a better idea of how large an operation it was.

A number of small residents' homes are located around the Old Mill site. Some of these cabins are owned by the Indians who keep them for temporary dwellings, when they come to the store for supplies.

The permanent home of these Indians are miles back in the hills, in valleys seldom seen by the white man.

Dry Alkali Lakes

At Mile 24.9 you will notice a number of dried up Alkali Lakes which contain an excess of natural soluble salts. That is the white stuff you see.

These Lakes at times do have a small amount of water in them but it is so salty it is undrinkable. There are two or three of them that you can see at this location.

Many of these in southern B.C. have been used commercially for the manufacturing of soap, cotton goods, and paper. Strong alkalies such as sodium hydroxide for household use is sold under the name lye.

Second View of The Coast Range Mountains

You climb a hill not too steep or long, and when you arrive at the summit you have a beautiful clear view of the white-capped Coast Range mountains and the highway winding its way before you.

This is the second view of the Coast Range mountains and you can see by their size you are getting closer.



Unnamed Lake

All throughout the Chilcotin country you come to lakes like the one pictured above, that are not on the map or are not named.

Each lake actually has its muskrat and beaver populations, complete with ducks and other birds too numerous to mention. And some had exceptionally good fishing.

They all possess as the above photo indicates, a quiet beauty which makes a person stop and reflect for a while.

The world gets off at this point and time has stopped, if only for a moment. Such is the effect of an unnamed Lake located 42 miles from Redstone !



Bunch Grass- Latin Name-Sporobolus

Well, this is it! This is the gold discovered by the fortune hunters of those pioneer days.

This is what made the ranches what they are today, Bunch grass. Let us take a closer look at it.

This grass is perennial and grows in large tough bunches. The stocks are erect and spreading, averaging 20 to 40 in high, which grows on salt in alkaline soil.

Under a hand lens, you can see large amounts of salt crystals on the grass stocks. Leaf blades are usually rolled.

It is a natural food for cattle and horses and one on which they do very well indeed.

It's the first grass to come up out of the snow in spring and is very green at this time of year. The animals like it so much. It is not uncommon to see them paw through the snow to get at it.

It is much tougher than tame hay, that is, the hay seeded by ranchers.



White Face Cattle

These are what ranches are all about and in the Chilcotin you'll see great numbers of them.

Whiteface is a nickname given to these beef cattle. They are Hereford cattle and are descendants of primitive animals from England. Hereford's are red with white faces and white markings.

They were brought over to North America in the early eighteen hundreds and are now the predominant breed on the ranges of both the US and Canada. They get along very well in this vast country with lots of range land and lots of water.

Abandoned Gold Mine

At the junction just before you turn to Tatla Lake you will see a road heading south to a place called Tatlayoko Lake.

A trip down this road could prove very rewarding indeed, especially if you discover gold.

There is the old abandoned Morris mine at Tatlayoko Lake where, in their attempt to mine gold and silver, they made many tunnels going into the side of the hill.

There are gold and silver deposits in this area, but not in sufficient quantities to make it profitable. At least that's how the stories go.

The project was abandoned a number of years ago with the death of one of the last of the old miners. Perhaps just before his death he was within inches of that large vein. Who knows?

It would be wise to check with the people at Tatla Lake before going to the old Maurice mine.



Great Horned Owl

Well you probably discovered what was in the picture but you must admit he sure blends in well with the environment.

Yes he's British Columbia's great horned owl and as you can see by his eyes, he doesn't like to have his picture taken. Let's take a closer look at him.

Like it or not, he's a bird of prey and feeds on rodents, toads, frogs, insects, and small birds. He can see in the daylight but can see better in partial darkness. He spends most of the day sleeping in a cave or, perhaps a hollow tree or some other secluded place.

His plumage is so soft and fluffy he is almost noiseless when in flight. His eyes are directed forward and are surrounded by disks of radiating feathers. That's what gives him that "wiser than thou look."

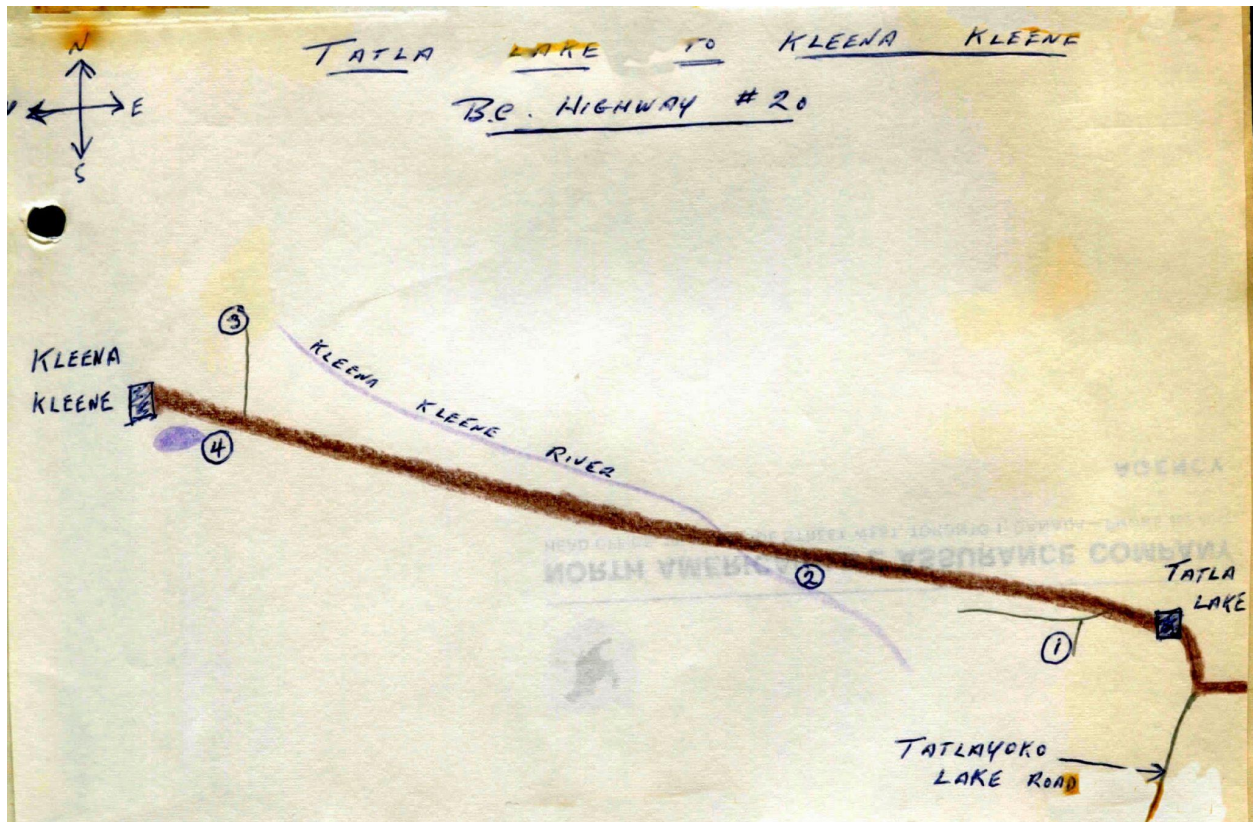
He gets pretty big, sometimes 2 feet high and his wings spread a distance of 4 to 5 feet.

How was it possible to get this photo? We'll take another look at him and you will notice a long wing feather or two hanging out of place on his right side near the ground.

Somehow he got his wing injured and was unable to fly. They are numerous in this area so chances of seeing them are good.

Chapter Seven

Tatla Lake to Kleena Kleene, B. C. Highway # 20





Tatla Lake

The above photo was taken looking east down the main street of the Tatla Lake community.

The name comes from the name of a large lake situated at the head of the community.

There is a large General Store and post office, restaurant garage, motel and other forestry government buildings.

The large house you see in the right of the picture, is the main Graham Ranch House, which is still occupied by some of his children today.

At one time their main source of supplies was from the coast but with the completion of highway # 20, they were able to deal quite well through Williams Lake as well. Tatla Lake is at the halfway point between Williams Lake and Bella Coola.



The Big House

It is a big house and that is how it's known to the people of Tatla Lake.

This house has been and still is the centre of all the activities in and around this community.

The Big House was built by Mr. and Mrs. Graham senior for themselves and their children, but also known far and wide by people as a hospitable place to stop for a while during their travels.

There are seven bedrooms and part of the house is presently being used as a cafe which is operated by Mr. and Mrs. Graham's daughter. You'll see some old log buildings in front of the garage. These are the dwellings that were home to the Grahams prior to the completion of the big house.

It was ranchers like Mr Graham who used to have to drive their cattle every fall from here to Ashcroft, a distance of some 300 miles.

It took strong and determined men to complete these annual drives, with the hardships they had to endure, and one glance at the portrait of Mr Graham senior at the Big House shows that he was that kind of man.

Mr. and Mrs. Graham are buried on the hilltop overlooking the house and valley they shared together.

A Large Tombstone

When they were building the forest ranger station at Tatla Lake, they made a large concrete slab on which to accommodate their helicopters.

They didn't know it at the time but they made the pad directly over the grave of an Indian lady.

Certainly that makes it the largest tombstone in this Chilcotin country, or perhaps, the largest in the world.



Old Fur Trading Post

Although the old post is a little battered, it is quite a good example of the type of building used by the early fur traders in this area.

As in many of the earlier buildings they used earth's sods for the roof, which made them warm in winter and cool in the summer.

This trading post goes away back in time and was operated by a man named Benny Franklin, the former owner of the Graham Ranch.

From this post, Mister Franklin used to exchange trade goods with the Indian people for their furs.

All of his trading goods were packed in by horses from Bute Inlet.

To see this old building go 1/2 mile from the post office and you'll see your road going to your left. Go down this road a few feet until you come to a gate. Go through this gate at approximately two hundred feet or so in, you will come to the Old Post.

Kleena Kleene Valley

Eight miles from Tatla Lake you come out to an open area giving you a magnificent view of the valley and the Kleena Kleene River.

The river runs to the left of the highway, and just a little further down, you'll see a handmade bridge crossing the river to a hay field on the other side.

This is a beautiful little log bridge and upon closer inspection you can see it was handmade.

Along this river, which flows to the Pacific Ocean, are some of the world's largest grizzly bears.

Honkers

This is the nickname given to the largest of all Canadian geese, the Canada goose.

Listen for them in this valley because this is the home for a great number of them.

They are related to both ducks and swans and the term Goose, strictly speaking, is applied to the female only. The male is called a gander.

When these wild geese migrate, they do so in a flying V formation and their honking can be heard from miles away. When you see these birds heading high above, towards the north, you know that spring has arrived for sure.

When they head south in the fall, watch out, because winter and cold weather are not far off.

The Canada Goose adds a great deal of colour to the personality of this land and because of their reliable migration and unmistakable chatter while high on the wing, a person is left with mixed feelings of joy and sadness.

Lodgepole Pine

This is a pine tree that has been given the nickname Jack Pine and is very common throughout the high elevations of the Fraser Plateau.

It is an easy evergreen to identify because of the needle-like leaves that are in bundles of 2, being 1 to 3 inches in length. As a matter of fact, it is the only two needle pine in British Columbia.

The cones of this pine have an amazing ability to withstand forest fires and while all other combustible items including the pine tree itself burns, they do not.

The seeds in these cones go into the burnt ground and grow into more pine trees. That's why you come to great stands of these pines growing all together in the forest.

The wood from the jack pine is used largely for railway ties and mine props.

In the spring, the inner bark can be eaten, either fresh or dried, providing a good source of food in emergencies. The nuts from the cones can be eaten also but they are so small in size that they are of no special consequence as emergency food.



Black Bear

This picture was taken about 10 miles from Tatla Lake, off to the right of the highway.

This particular bear did not seem to want to move. He rather stood and didn't seem to give a care one way or another.

There are a great number of bears in this area and sightings like this are quite common. Watch them, however, because although they appear clumsy, some can run at speeds of 25 to 30 miles per hour. They also can climb trees.

They eat almost anything edible, roots, berries, fish and though not frequently, they eat mammals.

Unless they are wounded or startled they rarely attack man.

Some adult bears are quite big. Some weigh over 600 lb.

It is a good idea to use Extreme Caution when they are about because even if they appear as tame as your pet, they are not! They are wild!



Storm Clouds

These clouds are speedy travelers, with some clouds producing lightning flashes and some dropping a little rain.

In a country where the unexpected is always expected, interesting events take place.

Perhaps within minutes in your particular location you are bathed in sunlight, making you forget for the moment it's a stormy day.



This is a picture of a sun break on a stormy Chilcotin day.

Radio Reception

In general, on the Fraser Plateau, radio reception is exceptionally good. When you reach this area it's nothing less than miraculous.

For example, with an inexpensive portable transistor radio, it is possible and quite easy to reach and keep a station tuned in from New Orleans, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco in the US, as well as stations like Calgary, Vancouver, and Victoria in Canada.



Second World War Repeater Station

This station was built in 1942 to help Canada defend itself against the Japanese. A repeater station is just what the name implies. It was possible to send a message by wire only so far. Then that message had to be repeated again to send it further along its way, perhaps to its destination.

During the war, there were as many as three people living here and operating the station for Canada's armed services. After the war only one operator lived upstairs until that was discontinued and he moved out. Since that time the station has been operating on an automatic mechanical basis.

To view this repeater station, turn right at 17.3 mi from the Tatla Lake Post Office and follow the road down 1/2 mile to the gate. Park here and follow the fence to the left about 25 ft and then the station is in full view.



Archie's Lake

This lake is just before you get to the store and post office at Kleena Kleene.

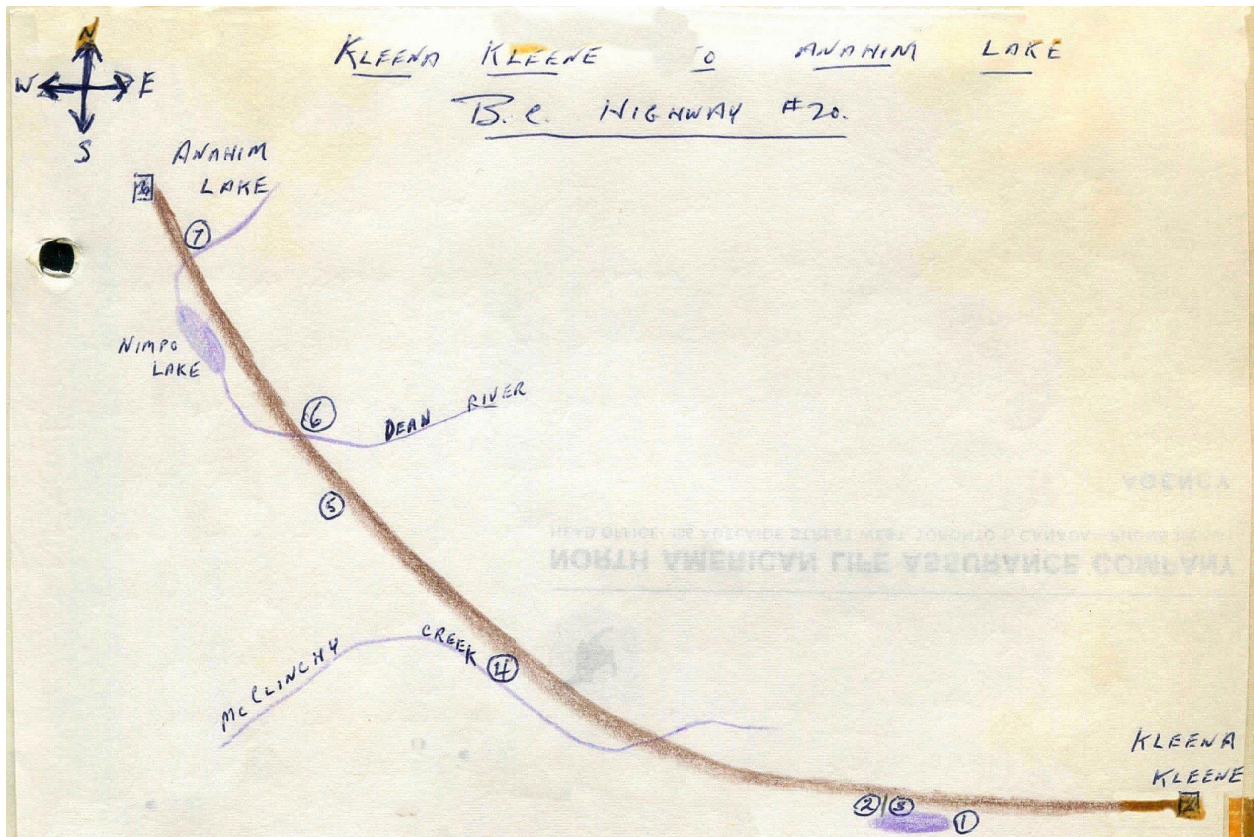
You can see the rugged peaks of the Coast Range mountains much clearer now.

The sunsets here are splashes of all the colours of the rainbow, and the lake reflects these back up to the darkened sky, producing more colour.

One finds it hard to match the scenic beauty of this spot with any other area ever seen before.

Chapter Eight

Kleena Kleene to Anahim Lake, B.C. Highway # 20





Kleena Kleene

Pictured above is the garage at Kleena Kleene. Across the street is the General Store and Post Office. The size of the garage indicates how large a number of buildings are throughout the Chilcotin. Why that large? Well you'll have to ask the owner about that.

All these buildings are on a private ranch and the highway actually goes through on a right of way.

The name Kleena Kleene is an Indian name which means “ the river that meets itself “ and as usual, they say it the way it is. The river originates from a lake and after travelling 40 miles in a circle it flows onward, directly beneath its starting point. In fact, the river that meets itself, does just that.

Perkins Peak

If you look directly back of the garage to the south you'll see a mountain peak. It's quite a small peak so you have to look very carefully.

There's all kinds of old prospectors' diggings up there, with tunnels reported to be as long as 400 ft, dug through in 1940.

There are a number of tunnels where they attempted to mine for gold.

A road goes up there but you should inquire before proceeding, as it's about 15 miles to the diggings at Perkins Peak.



Valley in Autumn

The above picture was taken where the highway goes down into the Kleena Kleene Valley.

As you can see, the colour of the aspen trees on the hills opposite, are starting to turn to a bright yellow.

In the middle of October the colours are at their best. The evergreens retain their rich colour, the leaves of shrubs turn scarlet red and aspen leaves turn a bright yellow, providing photographers and artists with much delight.



Clearwater Lake

To the left of the highway, 2.8 miles from Kleena Kleene Post Office, you will catch a glimpse of a beautiful lake.

There are good camping grounds here and also excellent fishing. The water is crystal clear and offers good swimming at the right time of the year.

The high mountain you see in the background is called by the Indian people "Naiguana " which means "big stick."

There are some excellent resorts to be found at this lake.

Sometimes, it is so quiet and still, you can hear a red squirrel feeding on a pine cone across the lake.

If you turn the picture upside down, you get almost the same picture.

Giant Ant Hill

There is a road 3.7 miles from the Post Office that goes to the left off the highway. This road leads you down to Clearwater Lake.

Approximately halfway down the road, towards the lake about 10 feet in on the right side, you'll see an anthill of unbelievable size.

It stands about 3 feet high and 5 feet or so across.

It is constructed of many things such as earth, sticks and millions of pine needles.

Ants are fond of the honeydew excreted by aphids and other small insects, and because of this, they feed and protect them, as humans do with cows in order to get milk.

Old Pete's Grave

At the campgrounds you will see an old cement foundation.

Follow a little path that leads up behind, to an indentation in the side of the hill where old Pete had his log cabin.

If you go up behind this indentation, you'll notice on the left a long mound of earth with a small wooden cross. This is where old Pete was buried.

The story goes that he owned all of the land around here at one time and one day, while hunting across the lake with two Indian friends, he died from a heart attack. His friends brought him back and buried him at this spot.

Incidentally, old Pete was a black man who came here from the United States. He was a very big man, as the length of the earth mound on his grave indicates.

Caribou

In the forest, starting five miles from Kleena Kleene Post Office, caribou abounded in countless numbers a great many years ago.

You could bag a caribou without even walking 100 yards.

With the arrival of the 30/30 carbines, countless numbers were taken.

Today it is indeed good fortune if you see any in this area.

Campgrounds

You cross over MacLinchy Creek at mile 7.

There is good fishing here and exceptionally good places to camp all along the creek. If there's anyone fishing within the length of a city block the place is crowded.

Wild birds and animals now become more plentiful and it is quite common to see the large American bald eagle swooping out of the sky after it's dinner.

There have also been sightings of the large North American Timber Wolf in this area. These are very large wolves, much larger than a large German Shepherd dog.

Original Telephone Line

Approximately 1/4 Mile past the MacLinchy Creek Bridge you will see the telephone line crossing over the highway. This line goes from Williams Lake to Bella Coola and was completed in 1912.

It is only a single line but was able to carry 7 conversations at one time.

A message could only be carried on so far, then the repeater station would relay it on to its destination.

The way a single wire accommodates several separate conversations, is similar to your television set, where if you turn to 1 channel, the others are blocked out, permitting you to receive only the one you selected.

Caribou Flats

Located 14 miles out from Kleena Kleene, you will notice a great open swamp area.

This is a good place to watch for moose, as they like this type of terrain and are often seen here.

This is a vast area and is well named as Caribou Flats.



Old Indian Rock Painting

These rock paintings are located 20.1 mi from Kleena Kleene.

To the left of the highway you'll see an old Caribou fence about 200 feet back. If you are unable to see a large boulder. from the road, go to this fence and look for it.

If you still are unable to see, it travels along the fence and you will find it.

There is actually a small beaten footpath between the boulder and the highway. You have to walk around the boulder to see all of the paintings.

In the above picture you can see paintings that appear to be a mask and an animal of some sort. The boulder itself is 30 feet or so high, and almost the same in breath. These paintings are said to be over 70 years of age.



The Oldest Known Dwelling on B.C.'s Highway # 10

Pictured above is the original cabin that Mr Jacob Lumos and his family lived in.

The dwelling, built in 1902, consisted of three rooms, complete with a small store for trading with the Indians.

This house was always open to any traveller who wanted to spend the night sleeping on the floor. All you had to provide were your own blankets.

This old building stands on the right side of the highway to 22.8 miles from Kleena Kleene Post Office.



Lumos Trail

This old trail was named after Jacob Lumos, who travelled from Bella Coola to the High Country to investigate the ranching opportunities.

This was in the year 1901.

Liking what he saw, he started the present ranch, located where the Dean River crosses the highway at mile 22.8.

All equipment and supplies had to be packed in from Bella Coola, exactly as seen in the above picture, which was taken in the early nineteen hundreds.

The trail was so good, it was used by a great number of people and today a new road to the coast is being built along the same route.

A Fire Tribute to the Dead

All throughout the Chilcotin you come across log cabins that were burned to the ground.

Only a few scraps of black charred wood remain to give evidence that once someone lived here. You see, it's the result of an old Indian custom.

If the head of the family passes on, father, husband, grandfather, the survivors moved on, burning the cabin behind them. It was also the custom to burn all personal belongings of a deceased person, thereby sending all material things to the spirit world.

Beautiful customs, by a beautiful people.



Nimpo Lake

This lake is one of the best-known lakes to many people from outside the Chilcotin area.

It is located 29 mi from Kleena Kleene.

The word “ Nimpo “ is Indian and means “water of many fish”.

This is a very active area with a couple of garages, stores, numerous resorts, and a landing place for many seaplanes. Sometimes as many as 20 to 30 planes land and take off again in one day.

There is real good fishing here, camping and swimming. It's a very large lake, so there's all kinds of elbow room and lots of outdoor fun for everyone.

Chilcotin War

At mile 32.7, you cross the Dean River, which flows out of Nimpo Lake.

As soon as you cross the bridge, to the immediate right of the highway, you will see a government plaque marking the spot where, in the eighteen hundreds, a war party of resentful natives attacked and killed members of a pack train.

They spread terror throughout the whole area until they were captured, convicted and hung in Quesnel.

Fish Traps Earth Works

There's a well-worn footpath just behind the Chilcotin War Government Plaque. If you follow that path up the earth mound, you'll come across a bronze marker set into a large boulder.

It states that in 1864, Alexandria MacDonald and seven companions defended these earth works against the Chilcotin, Tatla and Sitlecee Indians.

MacDonald and two of his party were slain and four others were wounded as they withdrew towards Bella Coola. This tablet commemorates the courage and fortitude of the early travelers of British Columbia's trails.

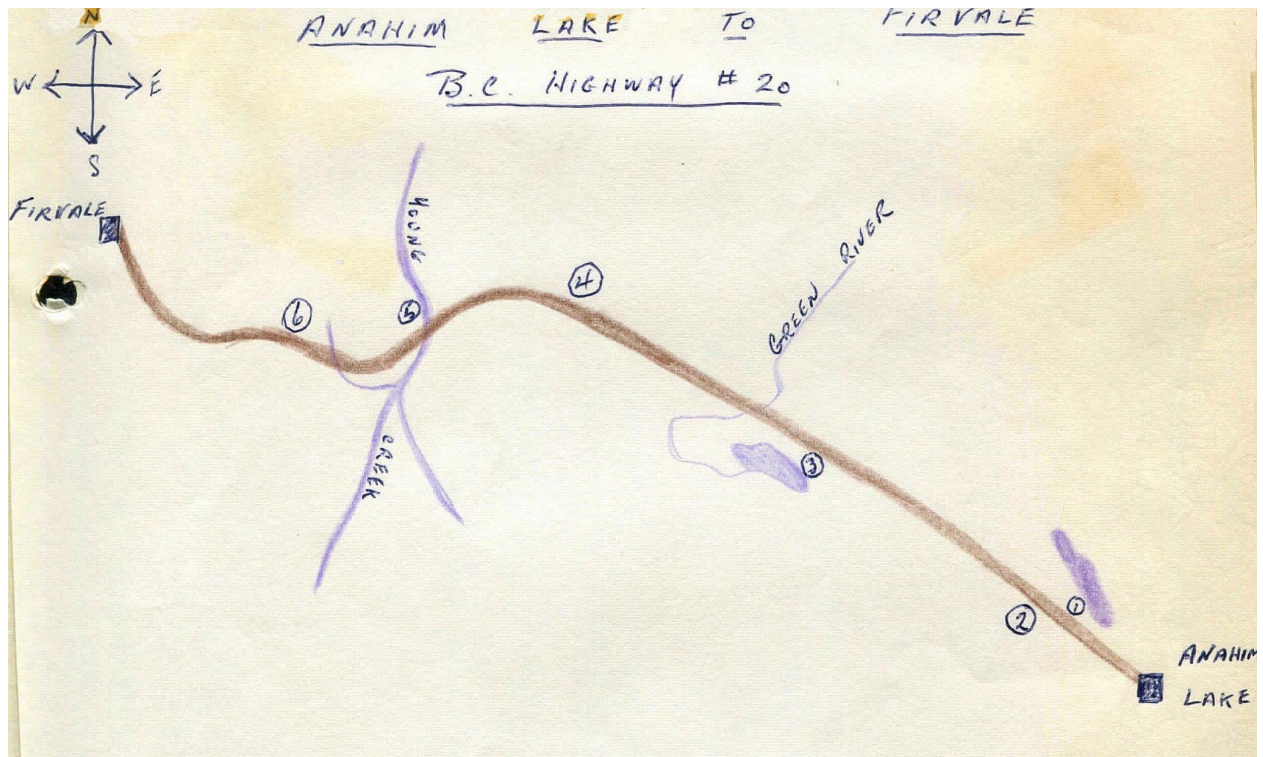
Jack Pine Fence

Just as you turn at the junction to Anahim Lake Post Office, you will see a fence made from the local jack pine trees. The fence is really something! You just have to see it to believe.

This style of fence can only be found at Anahim Lake and those who made it really made something completely functional and different.

Chapter Nine

Anahim Lake to Firdale, B.C. Highway #20





Anahim Lake

The main street of Anahim Lake is pictured above. This community is very high in altitude with only a few frost-free days and because of this they must import all their produce.

A visit here will prove to be very interesting, providing an unique opportunity to experience the real west.

The Ulkatcho Indian Reservation is also located just behind Anahim Lake, with a population of 289 people at this writing.

The Catholic sisters maintain a residential school at this reserve, for the children of this area, with some 60 in attendance.

The community was named after the Chilcotin chief Anahim. In the early eighteen hundreds, the Hudson's Bay Company had a fur trading post here, but unfortunately, there are no visible remains today.

Located at the heart of some of the best hunting and fishing country in BC, Anahim Lake will long be remembered by anyone who remains there for a day or two.



Stampede Grounds

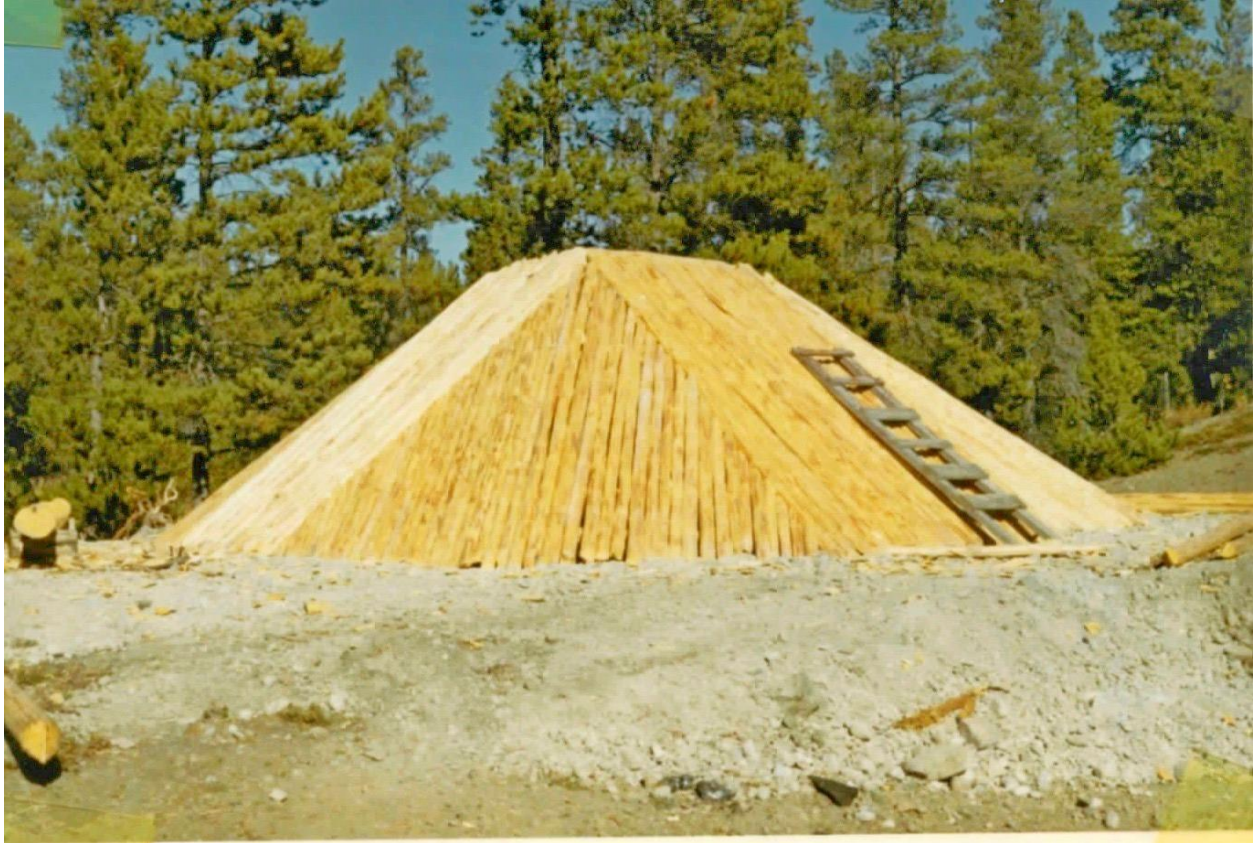
The picture above is the Anahim Stampede grounds, located just a little distance from the Post Office.

This is a two-day event and cowboys from all around come to take part.

This is really a Last Frontier Stampede. You hang onto the fence, while the competitions take place, that way you're almost part of the action. Just make sure a flying cowboy doesn't land on you.

For two wild days and nights this is it! After attending this stampede you'll know what a stampede really is. The month of July is the time, July 9 and 10.

There are all kinds of camping places around Anahim Lake and any number of river or lake shores for tenting, while attending the activities.



Keekwilly House

In the above picture is a reconstructed Indian dwelling called a Keekwilly House. This one was constructed at Anahim Lake and is a good example of one type of dwelling used by the Indians as long as 2000 years ago.

What it is actually, is an excavation into the ground, some 3 or 4 ft deep and perhaps twenty feet in diameter. They were also used for storage.

A lot of work was done to make this particular one and it was acknowledged by Canada's Prime Minister Trudeau, who visited Anahim Lake to dedicate it in 1971. Ask anyone in the Anahim Lake Community where it is located. This is the only place where you can see one that was made out of some of the same materials, including the clay used 2 thousand years ago.



Famous Wolf Hunter and Guide

Meet Thomas Squiness, the man who has done a great deal for his country and its people.

You will find his name associated with British Columbia's history in a number of ways.

He's the man who blazed the trail for the builders of Highway # 20.

Thomas Squiness knows the country. He was born here and hunted wolves for many years for the government. In his first year on this job, he can recall killing over 200 wolves.

In those days, there was quite a problem with the wolves killing off the moose population, so the government took steps to correct the situation.

During the second world war the Canadian Army was concerned about a possible Japanese invasion from Bella Coola to inland Canada. He can recall leading three or four thousand soldiers on snowshoes through the mountains to Bella Coola below. That must have been quite a sight.

Lake and Campgrounds

This lake and campground are located on the right of the highway, 2.7 miles from the Anahim Lake Post Office.

Nice place to camp while exploring the many trails that the pioneers used to pack their supplies in from Bella Coola.

This is quite a large lake providing an opportunity for people with canoes to get out and enjoy themselves.



Barron Trail

Located to the left of the highway at 2.8 miles from Anahim Lake Post Office is the Old Barron Trail.

Long before the highway was put through to Bella Coola, these trails were used by Indians and white men alike.

Many merchants from interior communities used to pack their store supplies up from Bella Coola on these trails by pack horses.

Such a man was a storekeeper from Quesnel by the name of Mr. Barron.

In the 1860s this trail was used a great deal by those travelling to the rich mines in the Caribou.

Today, the telephone company still uses this route for their lines to Bella Coola.

As you can see in the picture, the trail cuts through the dense stands of jack pine, heading straight for the rim of the rocky Coastal Mountains.

If you are silent, you can almost hear the eager pioneers, with their hopes and ambitions, clamoring with their animals down the trails. Such is our rich British Columbian heritage.



Unnamed Lake on the Barron Trail

This lake is located some two miles west on the Barron Trail.

It was covered with literally hundreds of ducks just before this picture was taken and you can still see a few that did not fly away.

There are a great number of old artifacts around this area such as old wagon parts, jars, bottles, many items, either lost or left, by the early travelers on this trail.

Hidden Springs

At 20.8 miles from the post office at Anahim Lake, there is a “hidden spring” located 10 to 20 feet off to the left of the highway towards the lake.

Behind the mountain spring is a lake. and to the immediate right are several unimproved campgrounds. You can see both the lake and the camp area from the highway but you cannot see the crystal clear water, unless you search the area on foot.

You must be careful about the water used to cook and drink with because it can be contaminated even if it appears clear.

But this spring water just gushes out from the underground, as if someone were pumping it. Cold and clean this spring provides a traveller with a refreshing drink at any time of the year.

Green River

At 20 miles from Anahim Lake, you cross over the Green River. A beautiful winding river which produces good catches of rainbow trout. This is also good moose and Caribou country.

Keep your eyes open and you'll see tents that are inhabited by the big game guides in the country. They live in this area during the hunting season with their families. They leave these camps with their clients and go back into the hills where the greatest number of animals are found. If the game is around, these people know where and how to get them, as they are descendants of a great hunting people. They are the big game Chilcotin guides.

Warning Sign

Note the sign on the right of the highway saying “no house trailers past this point”. It is recommended that attention be paid to this sign.

If your vehicle is not in real good repair you should not proceed too much further because the highway goes down from the summit of over five thousand feet, to the valley bottom below.

There is nothing to be concerned about as long as the signs are heeded and extra care in driving is taken.

Because of the long steep descent, you should make use of your gears as much as possible and be especially cautious of all turns you encounter



Summit

This picture above shows the road and the view from the highest point on the highway.

You are close to 1 mile above sea level, over 5200 ft high.

From here on in, the road goes down to the Bella Coola valley.

This summit is 28 mi from Anahim Lake.



Red Powder Rock Hill

100 yards further down from the summit, on the right side of the highway, is Red Powder Rock Hill.

The hill is located behind the evergreen trees. It is about 50 ft in height and is one of Mother Nature's little surprises.

The picture of Tweedsmuir Provincial Park above, was taken from the top of this hill.



Meadow in Tweedsmuir Park

One of the Great Wilderness Parks, Tweedsmuir, at this location, offers all the known varieties of Alpine flowers.

This park covers over 5400 square miles and was established in 1936 to keep things as they were.

Anyone who loves nature and the out-of-doors will love this park with its beautiful lakes, rivers, and wild animals.



Lonely Sentinels

They are the desolate reminders of the careless use of fire. The picture was taken in Tweedsmuir Provincial Park.



Youngs Creek

33.6 MI from Anahim Lake you come to Youngs Creek.

There are some nice places to camp along the creek, good trout fishing, and lots of interesting foot trails.

You are now about halfway down the mountain pass.

Trail Cabins

On the far side of the bridge, crossing over Youngs Creek, you will see a grass covered trail leading off to the right.

You cannot see the old cabin from the road, but if you follow the old trail up two hundred yards or so, you will find it snuggled in amongst the evergreen trees.

This is one of the old Indian and fur traders' cabin and is very old.

People who travelled this trail used this cabin to stay overnight, perhaps even longer, resting before carrying on their journey.

The timber is very thick here, so it is wise to keep your whereabouts in mind. It could be quite easy to get turned around here, so stay with the trail until you are more familiar with the surroundings.

Bottom Ground

Some forty miles or so from the Anahim Lake Post Office, you come to the bottom of the mountain pass.

Cedar, Maple, and other Coastal growth are now so abundant that the sun is completely hidden. This is really what they call "the jungle of the coast".

As you pass through these massive trees, you get an idea of what Vancouver was like many years ago. Some of the Douglas fir are so large you could drive a truck through them.

The highway winds its way through grove after grove of these coastal giants.

Bunchgrass Trail

On the right side of the highway at 42.3 Miles, if you look carefully, you'll see a slashed trail.

This is the old Bunchgrass Trail and was used by the Indians and the early trappers, travelling from the coast to the Chilcotin.

There is a post marker in the ground to indicate where the trail begins.

Tweedsmuir Lodge

To the left of the highway, at 52.4 miles, you come to Tweedsmuir Lodge.

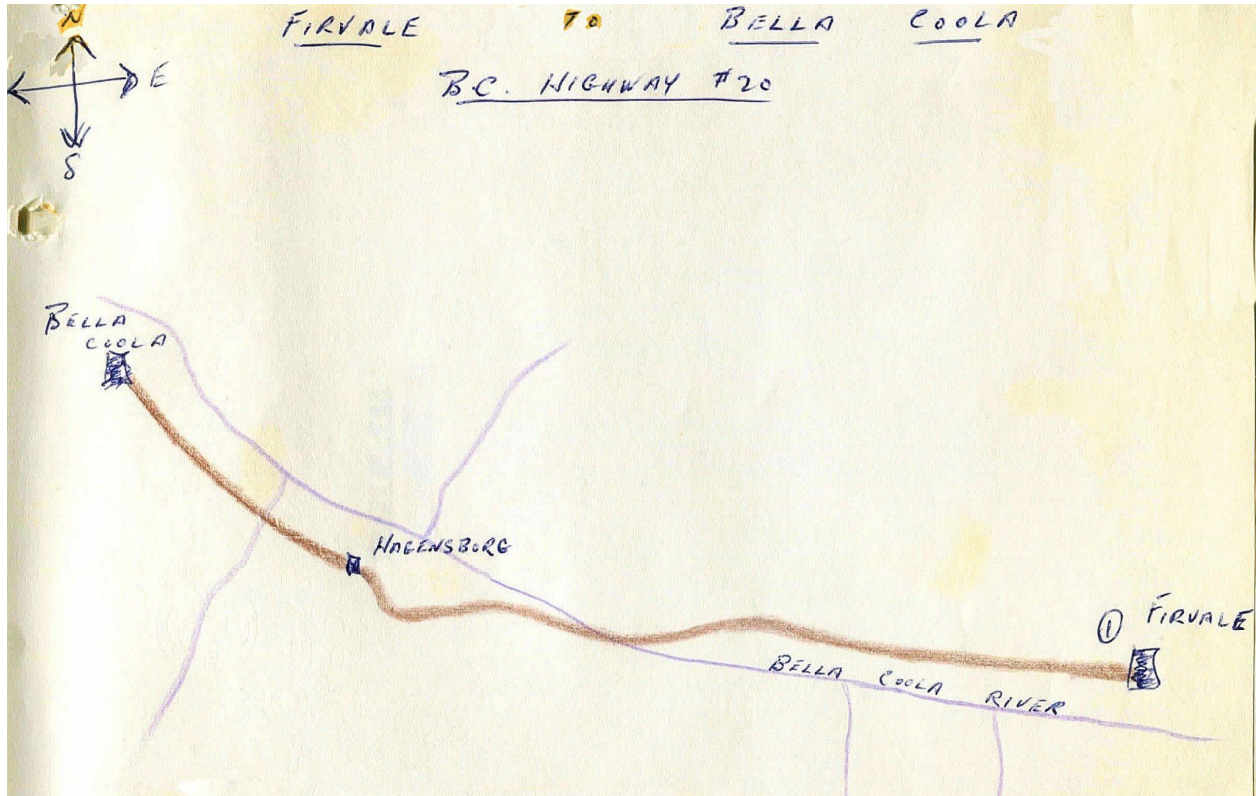
Just past the lodge is a government camp site called Burnt Bridge. A good place to camp if you are interested in fishing.

The rivers and the creeks in this area are reported to be as good if not better than other game fish producing waters in BC.

Trout fishing is excellent, steelhead, spring salmon and Coho are all good in season.

Chapter Ten

Firdale to Bella Coola, B.C. Highway # 20





Firvale

The community of Firvale is surrounded on all sides by high mountains. The majority of people living here are engaged in the logging industry, using the services provided by the 1 store and gas station.

The community received its name from the great stands of douglas fir located at this particular spot, the silent towering giants of The Bella Coola Valley.

Bears' Dens

To the right of the Firvale store, you'll see some high rock cliffs and if you look carefully, you'll notice some caves up there.

These are bear dens. In days gone by, trophy hunters used to come here in the month of February, and local guides used to flush the hibernating bears out for them.

This was obviously dangerous work but invariably the hunter got his trophy.

Even today, the people here are plagued by the great numbers of both black and grizzly bears, who go as far as to eat the apples off their trees.

The cougar is another animal that inhabits this area.in great numbers. Just recently they came across 5 large cougars in one group.

They are also currently losing some of their cattle to Timberwolves.



Coast Deer

In the above picture, you see a west coast Blacktail Doe and her fawn. This is a common sight in the Bella Coola Valley.

Right now they're having a meal of alfalfa, along with a herd of domestic cattle.

As you can see above, they are not too nervous and properly face the camera to have their picture taken.

During the hunting season you're lucky if you see them.



Coast Range

Are these the Canadian Rockies? They look as though they might be but these mountains are part of the Coast Range.

These mighty sentinels make you feel pretty small as they tower above the highway.

Some of these mountains are over 9600 feet high and some even have glaciers.

Unexcelled in majesty and sheer beauty, these peaks seem to be ever reaching for the top of the sky.

Bella Coola River

To the left of the highway, after you leave Firdale, is the Bella Coola River.

There are numerous places to camp along the banks and unequaled fishing to be enjoyed.

In addition to the resident Rainbow, Cutthroat, Dolly Varden, and Mountain Whitefish, there are large runs of steelhead from October to May, Chinese Chinook from May to mid-July, and Coho Salmon in September to October.

The finest fishing all year round.



Oldest Church in the Valley

Located in the community of Hagensborg, 15.4 miles past the Firvale store, is their first church, which was built in 1908.

A number of people from the state of Minnesota followed the Reverend C. Saughted to the area in 1894. Times were tough in the USA, so they came here seeking new opportunities. There were 89 people who came but not all of them stayed.

Some didn't like the area because of the dense forest and wild animals but the ones that did stay got right down to business and started clearing the land by hand.

Some of them farmed and some were fishermen. In 1936 they began logging in the area and this is the main industry today. Let's say hello to one of the people who came here in the year of 1894.



Resident of Hagensborg

Mrs. Mable Gross was a baby when she arrived at the valley in 1894 from Minnesota.

She recalls her parents saying how difficult it was for people to earn a decent living in the states. That's why they came here with great hopes of a better life.

They found it all right, but not without a great deal of hardships.

Mrs Gross's maiden name was Mabel Seisdahl and like the other pioneers, is of Norwegian descent.

Still very active, she runs her own farm with a very steady hand. She has a very warm smile when she recalls happy events of earlier days.

Mrs. Gross is a tremendous example of the courage and industry possessed by these pioneers.

British Columbia Canada can well be proud of these great people who braved the raw frontiers.

Western Red Cedar

As you can see, some of the trees in the Bella Coola valley were huge. This particular one was located just a few miles east of town.

When you recall that all the clearing had to be done by hand, you can appreciate the almost impossible task that was laid before them.

The picture was taken in the early nineteen-hundreds just before this giant tree was sent crashing to the ground..

Grizzly Bear

The Bella Coola Valley has all types of big game and that includes old “horribilis” the grizzly bear.

It is true that the largest bear recorded in British Columbia was taken in Tweedsmuir Park.

The skull of this animal was 16 by 9 and 9/16 of an inch and holds the number two position in the “Boone and Crochet Club, World Record Series” for grizzly bears excluding Alaska brown bears.

It is also true that the world's largest concentration of grizzlies are not far from Bella Coola. They are at Kwatna Bay.

Attacks on men are frequent and usually result from a sudden meeting at close range. They are shy creatures and the noisy travelers will seldom get close enough to see them, but if you do see them, use extreme caution and keep more than a decent distance away.

Orchards

About 16 miles from Firvale you start to notice the great number of fruit orchards.

You can see it's getting more and more like the Pacific coast with great numbers of cherry and apple trees growing along the highway.

Now you can notice a salt tang in the air from the ocean and with the seagulls gliding above, you know Bella Coola is not far away.



Bella Coola

This is the last western community on BC's Highway # 20.

Pictured above is one of the main streets looking west.

Bella Coola is located at the North Bentinck arm of Burke Channel, with a population of approximately 300.

As soon as you enter the village you will see 2 beautifully carved totem poles and suddenly you're aware of a completely different culture from the Chilcotin.

Logging and fishing are the two main industries here, with agriculture and tourism following behind. All the services you need can be found here.

Bella Coola can be reached by ferry, air, or Highway # 20.



Church and Coffee House

In the above picture, the Roman Catholic Church in Bella Coola is seen alongside a newly constructed coffee house.

As you can see, a beautifully carved and decorated totem pole towers above the entrance to the building.

These totem poles tell their own story with their carved images. Ask the Bella Coola Indians what story this particular totem pole is telling.

Alexander Mackenzie

As you go down the road towards the ferry wharf, there is a large rock on the right. There are two plaques on this rock.

At Dean Channel near Bella Coola, on July 22nd 1793, Alexander Mackenzie of the Northwest Company, with 9 companions, reached the Pacific tidewater and completed the first transcontinental journey across North America.

He wrote these famous words that were cut into the rock in 1927.

Alex Mackenzie
From Canada
By land
22nd July 1793

If it wasn't for the Indians warning him of turbulent waters ahead when he arrived at Alexandra on the Fraser river, goodness knows where he might have ended up.

Because of this warning, he and his party backtracked and headed westward at the Black Water river.



Arm Of the Pacific Ocean

The above picture was taken from the wharf, west of Bella Coola.

This is the end of the road, the North Bentinck arm of Burke Channel.

This is where the rivers meet the mighty and vast Pacific Ocean.

Where the cloud covered mountains go down to the sea.

British Columbia's beautiful Pacific Coast.



Chilcotin Sunset

The day is dying but not the land.

Surely the sun will rise tomorrow and once more provide light and warmth to the people along the Chilcotin trail.

The memories will be kept alive, the memories of the beauty and grandeur of this unique part of British Columbia.

The warmth and strength of her people will live on when you reflect upon those you are fortunate enough to meet.

Keep young and strong Chilcotin.

British Columbia is more beautiful because of you!

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Author and Photographer
Philip Matte



Philip was an intrepid explorer of local and remote communities in British Columbia, the author of this travelogue and an avid off road field naturalist.

Philip's warm personality endeared him to the people he met on his travels. Their knowledge of local history and remarkable citizens enriched and informed much of this travelogue.

By their example, Philip and his wife Muriel, provided countless opportunities for their children to share in the travelling and outdoor adventures that are unique to British Columbia.

Philip Matte passed away June 13, 2018

His daughter Gail has published his manuscript post humously. An honour!

Your questions and comments are welcomed.

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